

State, DOE reach agreement on single-shell tanks

The Department of Energy Office of River Protection and the Washington State Department of Ecology are proposing to remove Hanford single-shell tanks S-102 and S-112 from interim-stabilization requirements so that ORP may instead proceed directly with accelerated retrieval of the waste under the Tri Party Agreement, the legally binding pact guiding the cleanup of the Hanford Site.

Tank-farm contractor CH2M HILL Hanford Group is currently removing pumpable liquid wastes, a requirement called interim stabilization, under an aggressive schedule negotiated by DOE and Ecology in 1998. The schedule covers the final 29 of Hanford's 149 older single-shell tanks that contain removable liquid waste. The agreement includes annual milestones for moving the liquid waste to newer double-shell tanks. To date, CH2M HILL has successfully removed approximately 2.9 million gallons of liquid waste from the single-shell tanks.

"When a tank is interim-stabilized, the liquid portion of the waste is removed and a solid remains in the tank," said Andrew Stevens, ORP manager of the Single-Shell Tank Project. "Under this proposal, we'll retrieve all of the waste — the liquids and the solids — in these two tanks. This will allow ORP and CH2M HILL to accelerate the retrieval of the waste, and achieve interim closure status with Ecology's approval."

"This proposal allows us to accelerate the retrieval of all of the waste in these two tanks, not just the pumpable liquids, as we continue to look for new ways to accelerate our tank-closure mission," said Ryan Dodd, vice president of Closure Projects for CH2M HILL Hanford Group.

Tanks S-112 and S-102 are in the 200 West Area of the Hanford Site, and contain more than a million gallons of liquid, sludge and saltcake waste. Sludge waste can vary in consistency from mud to thick peanut butter, while saltcake can vary in consistency from wet beach sand to a solid salt form. ORP and CH2M HILL will employ a variety of technologies such as sluicing to remove the liquid and solid waste from the tanks.

The retrieval equipment for Tank S-112 has been fabricated and is in final testing. Hanford crews are installing equipment and other infra-structure needed to begin retrieving waste from the tank this summer.

"Getting the work done ahead of the TPA milestones is good news for the environment," said Jeff Lyon, Ecology's Tank Waste Storage Project manager. "The threat of leaks or other contamination is always a concern with the single-shell tanks. Retrieving more of the waste, and doing it sooner, reduces that risk significantly."

Under the proposal, ORP and CH2M HILL would be required to finish removing the waste from the tanks by 2005. Once Ecology has reviewed the success of the retrieval efforts, the tanks would be considered for interim-closure status. If retrieving the waste does not produce the desired results in tanks S-112 and S-102, DOE and CH2M HILL would still be required to stabilize the tanks by removing the pumpable liquids.

A public comment period on the proposal to place S-112 and S-102 in abeyance from the interim-stabilization agreements will begin June 9 and end July 11. The proposal and corresponding change to the Tri Party Agreement will not be finalized until all comments from the public have been addressed. ■